

## [Review] Marja-Leena Sorjonen, Liisa Raevaara and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (2017) Imperative turns at talk

Article (Accepted Version)

Williams, Simon (2018) [Review] Marja-Leena Sorjonen, Liisa Raevaara and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (2017) Imperative turns at talk. *Discourse Studies*, 20 (5). pp. 695-697. ISSN 1461-4456

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/73333/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Marja-Leena Sorjonen, Liisa Raevaara and Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (eds), *Imperative Turns at Talk*, Amsterdam; Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2017; vi + 435 pp., E99.00/US\$149.00 (hbk).

**Reviewed by:** Simon Williams, *Sussex Centre for Language Studies, University of Sussex, UK*

This monograph, the 30<sup>th</sup> in the John Benjamins series on language in social interaction, examines the production of imperatives in naturally occurring talk. The collection of 12 empirical papers is intended for a specialist readership, but with its multimedia format and meticulously constructed argument the book will also be accessible to graduate students with an interest in conversation analysis (CA). Like others in the series, it is noteworthy for its breadth, depth and presentational quality: in this case, the cross-linguistic nature of the content; the treatment of similar problems in different environments (e.g. the circumstances in which an imperative might be repeated, with or without variation, by speaker or addressee); and the high production values of the volume, with its charts, colour photographs and line drawings. The empirical chapters (Chapters 2-13) are preceded by an introduction from the editors (Chapter 1) and followed by a summative chapter (Chapter 14), and arranged in three sections: the first (Chapters 2-6) focuses on the structure of spoken imperatives, the second (Chapters 7-9) on longer sequences containing imperatives, and the third (Chapters 10-13) on imperatives in asymmetric situations.

A table presenting a cross-linguistic comparison of imperative morphology (Sorjonen, Raevaara and Couper-Kuhlen, Chapter 1) and a cline of addressee commitment to action (Zinken and Deppermann, Chapter 2) serve as reference markers for the rest of the volume. The cline is a reminder of the increasingly likely modification to the imperative sequence the further removed, physically or mentally, the addressee is from the directed course of action - from unmarked imperative forms eliciting action within an ongoing joint activity (Mondada, Chapter 3) to marked, i.e. modulated, forms when the requester alone will benefit from compliance (Rossi, Chapter 4). For example, Heinemann and Steensig (Chapter 5) investigate the mitigating effects of the Danish particles *lige* (used in consensual action) and *bare* (to grant permission or advise as a solution, depending on whether preceding or following the imperative). Where unmarked imperatives presume compliance, and are not followed by expressions of gratitude, and they routinely occur across a range of interactional examples (Bolden, Chapter 6), it can be inferred that the deontic stance of the speakers is congruent and the request form normative, perhaps even implying intimacy.

The short second part explores more extended sequences and provides further cross-linguistic insights. For example, in both Finnish and English, where the participants are not engaged in practical joint activities, an initial directive imperative, if resisted, is followed by a second person present tense declarative, e.g. 'You drive me home now' (p. 237), rather than a reiteration of the imperatively formatted directive (Chapter 7). Etelämäki and Couper-Kuhlen conclude that, despite variations in morphological form, languages may thus operate within similar parameters. Like other contributors, Sorjonen

(Chapter 8) notes that, where both participants are involved in a project, the imperative speaker expresses direction; where they are not, mere encouragement. In the former case, speakers exercise their deontic rights and the imperative assumes 'immediate commitment' (p. 215). An unmarked imperative follows a turn that appears to state a future certainty, while an imperative modulated with the Finnish particle *vaa(n)* (cf English 'just') responds to a turn that displays uncertainty about performing the nominated action. This is most obvious when the prior turn is a request for permission. Further evidence of the exploitation of imperatives to negotiate deontic rights appears in examples from mother-daughter interaction (Keevallik, Chapter 9) and helps to explain how the imperative achieves such apparently contradictory expressions as commanding and accepting, e.g.

Mother: I'll do X

Daughter: (Don't) do X (p. 289)

By answering in the imperative form and reusing the verb from the first turn, the daughter's reply illustrates how an assertion in a non-first sequential position can '[recast] deontic rights' (p. 291) and accomplish directive action itself, effectuating the daughter's increasing independence.

That the environment for unmodulated imperatives is joint action and mutually accepted deonticity is confirmed in Part 3, in which the speakers are in unequal but fiduciary relationships, e.g. doctor-patient (Lindström, Lindholm, Norrby, Wide, and Nilsson, Chapter 10), instructor-client (Rauniomaa, Chapter 11), and teacher-pupil (Stevanovic, Chapter 12). The role difference is important as it provides opportunities for speaker negotiation of deontic or epistemic authority through imperative turns, a theme that appears in nine of the book's chapters. Doctors produce unmodulated imperatives in the physical examination phase of consultations, and modulated imperatives in openings, closings and projections such as arrangements for the next appointment (Chapter 10). Similarly, a driving instructor's unmodulated imperatives present the action as primarily within the driver, i.e. the addressee's, control (Chapter 11); and in violin lessons, the Finnish speaking teacher's non-cliticised turns occur where she and the pupil are already in an ongoing collaboration and the pupil is performing (Chapter 12). In a cookery class (Raevaara, Chapter 13), the teacher's imperatives again manage actions already in progress while declaratives initiate a new activity, the choice being a means of encouraging independence. As Auer (Chapter 14) points out, the imperative accomplishes much more than 'commanding' (p. 422); far from being coercive, it coordinates ongoing joint activity by prompting actions and being linked to the here-and-now.

The volume has been meticulously prepared. Images are numbered and cross-referenced to the accompanying transcript, each of which is glossed twice in English, first literally and then idiomatically. Exemplar imperative turns are highlighted in grey throughout, and commentary on the transcripts serves as a linguistic and cultural explanation of the interaction. Much of the data is video-based and therefore multimodal in character, with accompanying stills or representational line drawings providing the

contextual background missing from early CA studies. An appendix contains transcription conventions and glossing symbols, and separate author and subject indexes. The book offers a fascinating insight into the social-interactive genesis of grammatical constructions.

This enjoyable book fully succeeds in its aim of explaining the emergence of grammar from the patterns and regularities within social interaction.